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ABSTRACT

This report examines the development of school choice policies as an element of educational reform, describes open enrollment as one form of school choice, outlines other types of school choice programs, describes Minnesota's various forms of educational choice, explores arguments for and against choice, and discusses issues and concerns for students with disabilities. The report then presents a study which evaluated opinions of families (n=75) of students with disabilities participating in one of Minnesota's school choice options, open enrollment. In addition to general demographic information, the survey included items related to open enrollment information sources, family decision-making, and the effects of the decision on participating students. Results indicated that: (1) most parents did not experience any problems obtaining information; (2) over half the parents thought the services would be better as a result of a transfer; (3) over half the respondents felt that positive behavior changes in their children as a result of open enrollment included increased confidence in abilities, improved motivation to learn, improved academic performance, satisfaction with teachers and learning, better relations with friends, increased sense of responsibility, and higher education aspirations. Results suggest generally favorable responses for families of students with disabilities participating in the open enrollment option. (Contains 26 references.) (JDD)

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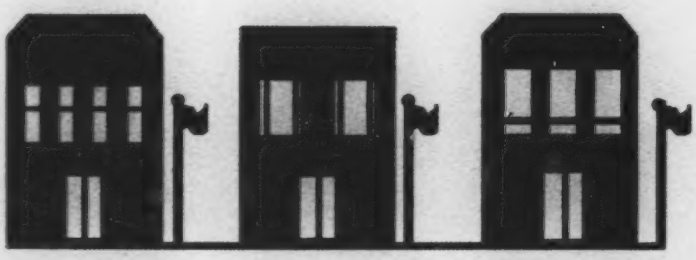
## Research Report No. 9



## Enrollment Options for Students with Disabilities

James E. Ysseldyke, Cheryl M. Lange, and Bob Algozzine

The College of Education
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

EC 302 60P

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Abstract

The decade of the 80s will surely be remembered by educational historians as a period of intense interest in educational reform. If this will be reflected positively in special educational history, significant and important answers to questions related to open enrollment and other school choice options need to be positive. The extent to which this occurs will largely be a function of the nature and type of research that local, state, and federal agencies address when considering educational alternatives for students with disabilities in the next decade and century. The purpose of this research was to evaluate opinions of families of students with disabilities participating in one of Minnesota's school choice options, open enrollment. In addition to general demographic information about the respondents, the survey included items related to open enrollment information sources, family decision-making related to open enrollment, and the effects of exercising the open enrollment option on participating students. Results of this research suggest generally favorable responses for families of students with disabilities participating in the Open Enrollment Options Program in Minnesota.

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**Open Enrollment And Students With Handicaps: Where Are We And Where Are We Going?**

For America's public schools, the decade of the 80s was the worst of times and the best of times. Never before had the public schools simultaneously received such severe criticism and what has been called the "greatest and most concentrated surge of educational reform in the nation's history" (Doyle & Hartle, 1985, p. 1). In response to what was called "a rising tide of mediocrity" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 1), state after state enacted tougher graduation requirements, more educational testing as evidence of renewed searching for accountability, stiffer merit pay and certification requirements for teachers, and other "revolutionary" solutions to improving their educational systems (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Initiatives for changing America's schools came in "three waves of educational reform" (Ysseldyke, Algozzine, & Thurlow, 1992).

Work reported in the first wave focused on dangers of mediocre education to the health and growth of the nation. For example, the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) produced a report entitled, "A Nation At Risk: The Imperative For Educational Reform" in which arguments were presented suggesting that excellence was the norm in American education. In another report, it was argued that schools have been forced to play so many roles that they are in danger of not doing any of them well (Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Policy, 1983). In advocating for changes to improve education, most of the first wave reports stressed

commitment to higher standards and more time and energy being spent by students, teachers, and administrators (e.g., homework, more courses, more responsibilities). Concern for students with disabilities was not prominent in these first reports that focused more on what was wrong than on how to bring about change (Pugach, 1986; Ysseldyke, Algozzine, & Thurlow, 1992).

The need to improve school organization and policy as well as qualities of teachers was central to the second wave of educational reform which began in 1986 with the publication of "Time For Results" (National Governors' Association, 1986). No longer was more of the same seen as a viable alternative for improving education; improvements were viewed as likely to occur only when qualitative (not just quantitative) changes were in place. For students with special learning needs, this was the first recognition that extraordinary procedures and approaches would be required to meet national goals associated with the excellence in education movement (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Pugach, 1986; Ysseldyke, Algozzine, & Thurlow, 1992).

The third wave of school reform emphasized more than ever before the needs of students not currently being met by the educational system (e.g., disadvantaged, dropouts, students at risk, students with disabilities). Reconstruction of the educational system was seen as the solution to preparing children for the next century. Calls for consensus about educational goals and strategies to reach them were prevalent and national educational goals were proposed by government officials (Ysseldyke, Algozzine, & Thurlow, 1992).

School reform has come of age. Beginning with identification of the sad state of affairs in what was characterized as an educational system and ending with articulated national goals and questions related to how to achieve them, efforts to improve education moved rapidly during the 1980s (Ysseldyke, Algozzine, & Thurlow, 1992). Reports on the condition of education focused interest on problems related to the quality of the teaching force and the content and structure of teacher preparation programs (Pugach, 1987). Reports on the condition of education motivated professionals to act differently, too (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Approaches ranging from simple administrative practices such as lengthening the school day or setting higher expectations for students to full-scale restructuring of educational systems (such as providing parental choice in selecting a school) have been proposed in efforts to change education (Doyle, 1991; Ysseldyke, Algozzine, & Thurlow, 1992). Public school choice is part of the overall efforts around the country to restructure the educational system and create new incentives for schools to be improved.

**Choice: A Promising Departure For Reforming Schools**

Providing parents and students with alternatives for where to go to school is considered among the most innovative and promising reforms to have gained momentum during the late eighties (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Doyle, 1991). Within recent years, more than 20 states proposed or passed legislation establishing or expanding public school choice options (Education Commission of the States, 1989). The federal government recently sponsored a conference on choice

programs in the public schools and news stories, editorials, and popular news magazines are increasingly covering issues related to the idea of providing parents and students with greater options in their education (Education Commission of the States, 1989). President Bush has declared that "expanding parents' rights to choose public schools is a national imperative" (Education Week, 8, January 18, 1990 p. 1).

Public school choice has taken many forms. It can happen within school districts or across district lines. It can include a few schools within a district or all schools in a district or state. It can involve a few students in a district or every student in the state. Choices can be made by parents, students, and teachers.

The practices that states have adopted relative to choice are varied. Most states have at least one district that permits within-district enrollment options. More than 20 states have considered or are considering some form of across district educational choice. Several states have passed legislation promoting interdistrict choice as a way of providing broader educational options to parents and students. Some states provide educational alternatives only to students who have not been successful in traditional educational settings; Second Chance Programs in New Jersey and Colorado require that students be out of school for at least six months before being eligible to enroll in any school in any district. Nine states have postsecondary enrollment options that allow capable high-school students to take courses at colleges and universities. Most school districts have

intradistrict choice plans. Schools of choice in some states include magnet or residential schools. Lawmakers in 15 states currently are considering open enrollment legislation or awaiting recommendations from official boards or task forces charged with developing public school choice proposals, 6 others are considering more limited plans (e.g., for "at risk" students or high school upperclassmen). A summary of public school choice alternatives (Ysseldyke, Lange, & Delaney, 1992) is presented in Figure 1.

## How Does Open Enrollment Differ From Other "Choice" Options?

Open enrollment is one form of "choice" in the public education system. "Choice" is the term used to indicate that there are alternatives within public education, and that parents, students, and teachers can exercise educational decision-making power by choosing among the alternatives. Various forms of choice exist. The open enrollment form of choice, in the most comprehensive sense, refers to a state-level policy in which students may transfer from their home district to any other district.

Minnesota is on the cutting edge in providing educational choice options to parents and public school students. The Minnesota open enrollment law was one of the most comprehensive and far-reaching educational reform efforts undertaken by a state, and it brought national attention to the state, since Minnesota was the first state to enact open enrollment legislation. Two other states (Iowa and Arkansas) were quick to follow with limited

Figure 1

Types of Educational Choice Programs

| | |
|---|---|
| Magnet Schools | This type of program was originally designed to integrate schools by attracting minority and white students to attend the same school. These schools usually have a particular curricular theme or pedagogical foci. Research has demonstrated that schools of this type may also produce many academic benefits for students. Enrollment to these schools may be selective and may also depend on the availability of space for the additional student. |
| Postsecondary Enrollment Programs | These programs allow students in secondary schools to attend classes in colleges and universities and receive high school or college credits for their work. Individual programs may allow a student to attend the college or university anywhere from a part-time to a full-time basis. These programs include guidelines as to how earned credit applies towards high school and college graduation. |
| Drop-Out Prevention Programs | These programs allow eligible minors and adults who have not succeeded in a school, and students at-risk, to attend an alternative school. These alternative schools may be in or outside of the school district in which the student lives. |
| Intradistrict Open Enrollment | These programs allow parents to choose public schools for their children to attend from among those available in the district in which they live. |
| Interdistrict Open Enrollment | These programs allow parents to choose schools for their children to attend that are outside of their school district. There are various types of restrictions and conditions which states have placed on their versions of this type of open enrollment. |

Figure 1 (continued)

Types of Educational Choice Programs

| | |
|---|---|
| Voucher Programs | In these programs, parents may elect to have their children attend private schools, and their tuition is paid with public education funds. These funds may come in the form of either a voucher, or an income tax deduction for the parent. |
| Tuition Agreement Programs | In this type of program, towns which do not have an established school for students to attend, pay the tuition necessary for that student to attend another school of their choice. |
| Charter Schools | In the state of Minnesota, one or more licensed teachers may set up a charter school within a school district. These schools contract with the school district as a cooperative or a non-profit organization. The charter school determines for itself the grades and age levels that the school will serve. These schools employ alternative forms of instruction and outcomes-based education practices to enhance student learning. |

forms of open enrollment and Nebraska now has enacted legislation as comprehensive as Minnesota's, if not more so. Other states are considering and adopting choice plans of their own. Many states and districts already have some form of "choice." In order to address the possible implications of open enrollment for students with disabilities, it is necessary first to understand what "open enrollment" is and how it differs from other "choice" options.

In Minnesota, the "School District Enrollment Options Program" joins six other forms of educational choice on a statewide basis: (1) Programs of Excellence, (2) Postsecondary Enrollment Option Program, (3) High School Graduation Incentives Program, (4) Area Learning Centers, (5) Educational Program for Pregnant Mothers and Minor Parents, and (6) Charter Schools. These forms of choice are described in brief in Figure 2. One of the newer forms of choice, which has come to be known as "Open Enrollment," applies to students entering kindergarten through grade 12.

Other states do have programs that are referred to as "programs of choice" (see Review of School Choice Programs in the Fifty States, 1992). Magnet schools are a common example of "choice" programs. Open enrollment within a single school district is another relatively common example of a "choice" program. None of these programs is as comprehensive as Minnesota's open enrollment program. But, many other states are considering the adoption of open enrollment policies similar to that in Minnesota, and Nebraska has done so.

Figure 2

Minnesota Enrollment Options Programs

Learners in Minnesota have several enrollment option programs which allow them to choose the school or education program they wish to attend.

| | |
|---|---|
| Postsecondary Enrollment Options program | Provides 11th and 12th grade students, who qualify for the postsecondary institution of their choice, the opportunity to take college courses for high school credit. The program gives the student choice of a wider variety or more advanced courses than may be available in their high school. |
| Open Enrollment Program | Allows students kindergarten through 12th grade the opportunity to apply to attend a school outside the district in which they live. Applications are due in the non-resident district before January 1, except for those choosing to enter or leave districts with desegregation plans. |
| High School Graduation Incentives Program | Designed for students who are not likely to graduate or who have dropped out of school before getting their diplomas. These learners may choose from a variety of education options to complete the requirements needed to graduate. |
| Area Learning Centers | Offer personalized education programs, year round, day and evening, to accommodate the needs of learners. A wide variety of courses, leading to diplomas, are taught using alternative methods of instruction. Additional services are provided to assure each learner's success. Learners aged 12 through adult may attend. |
| Public or Private Alternative Programs | Personalize the education of learners at risk of not completing high school. Classes are taught using alternative methods and flexible scheduling. These programs are offered during the typical school day and year. |
| Education Programs for Pregnant Minors and Minor Parents | Designed to encourage parenting and pregnant teens to continue their education and receive their high school diplomas. A variety of education options are available. Child care and transportation may be arranged. |
| Charter Schools | Educationally, financially, and legally independent from a school district. They can be started by licensed teachers who get permission from the State Board of Education and their local school board. They are run by an independent elected board of directors. |

Source: Minnesota Department of Education.

In the open enrollment program in Minnesota, any student entering kindergarten through grade 12 may choose to apply to transfer to a school or program located in a district other than the one in which the pupil lives. Certain conditions influence the implementation of the open enrollment option. For example, a student may be denied entrance to a district if the district lacks space in a grade-level, program, school, or district. Further, a student may be denied entrance if the district would fall out of compliance with desegregation guidelines. While individual school districts make their own decisions about acceptance and rejection of applications, decisions may not include previous academic achievement, athletic or other extracurricular ability, handicapping condition, proficiency in the English language, or previous disciplinary proceedings. State monies follow students who use this option.

**Issues For Those Who Choose Alternative Schools**

The literature contains arguments both for and against open enrollment, as well as for other "choice" options. The proponents of "choice" are perhaps most outspoken. They argue that no single educational program is best for all children, and that parents and schools together must address the different ways that students learn and how schools can provide the best education for all children. Many of these views have been summarized in a recent book, *Public Schools By Choice: Expanding Opportunities for Parents, Students, and Teachers*, edited by Joe Nathan. Research findings from nearly 120 studies that "lend support to the choice

proposal" have been documented by Raywid (see Raywid, 1982). Among the arguments are that school choice plans make education competitive and accountable, and give parents and students the kinds of choices they should have. Increases in parent involvement and decreases in school dropout rates are among the cited results of implementing "choice" in schools. Increases in teacher satisfaction and student achievement also have been identified as outcomes of implementing choice options.

Arguments against choice have been numerous also, though perhaps not as vocal. The National Education Association officially announced its opposition to any federal or state mandatory choice plan on the grounds that it would "compromise the union's commitment to 'free, equitable, universal, and quality public education for every student'" (Olson, 1989). It has been argued that choice mandates have the goal of decreasing local control of schools and centralizing decision-making at the state level. It has been argued that a goal of open enrollment is to reduce the number of small school districts, thereby reducing educational variation.

The arguments that have been generated for and against "choice" have been waged at all types of choice options. Some data are available on the most limited types of options, such as magnet schools. However, no data are available on comprehensive choice options, particularly those referred to here as "open enrollment," in which the parent and student have the option of the student attending virtually any school district desired.

**Issues And Concerns For Students With Disabilities**

The projected pros and cons of open enrollment become more specific as they relate to students who have disabilities and served in special education programs. For example, to a family desiring to protect a member with Down Syndrome from teasing and ridicule, the open enrollment policy means that they can enroll the child in a district where mainstreaming will not be a required part of programming. To one administrator in a small urban school district surrounded by many rural school districts, the consumer-orientation of the open enrollment plan is very likely to mean that his school will become the favorite school in the state for students with emotional and behavior problems (EBD). His school has an excellent program for EBD students and he envisions an onslaught of transfers whose parents want them to benefit from this program. He does not envision the school district declaring the program "full" anytime in the near future. To a mother in a small district in northwestern Minnesota, the choice is not really present, for she feels coerced by her local school district to keep her son in the program for children with mental retardation. If her son leaves, the program won't have enough students, and one special education teacher will have to be dismissed. To a young woman of 16 who has barely been making it in her school district, a move to a district not too far away means that she will be subject to more lenient graduation criteria and will no longer be labeled as disabled. She sees both of these changes as beneficial for future employment. To a father in a suburban school district, the new, more stringent graduation requirements being implemented

in his son's school district will result in significant programming changes. So, while the learning disabilities program will continue to help his son acquire some basic skills, regular classes in the district now will be paced much too fast for him, and he will face failure in any mainstream setting where previously he would have been okay.

The arguments and concerns that potentially arise for school districts and for individuals with disabilities and their families are numerous. Issues arise for those who plan to transfer from one district to another as part of open enrollment, and for those who do not plan to transfer from one district to another. Further, there are issues that arise for districts that provide special education services, particularly for those districts that experience either large increases in special education student enrollments or large decreases in special education student enrollments. Whether there are actual problems or merely misunderstandings related to each of these areas, it is clear that data are needed before accepting or rejecting choice as a viable educational reform option.

**What Questions Will Drive Reform And Practice?**

Little concern has been expressed for the effects of open enrollment on students with special learning needs (Ysseldyke, Algozzine, Thurlow, & Nathan 1991). Issues related to the effects of open enrollment on students with disabilities have been organized into three groups: (1) issues for students who transfer between districts, (2) issues for districts experiencing large increases in the number of special education students, and (3) issues for personnel preparation professionals. The focus of this research was an analysis of questionnaire responses from families of students with disabilities participating in open enrollment programs in the state of Minnesota. The research addressed the following questions for students with disabilities.

Information Sources

1. Where do families who participate in open enrollment obtain information about programs?
2. What problems do families who participate in open enrollment encounter trying to obtain information?

Decision-Making

1. Who first decides that open enrollment options should be pursued?
2. What topics related to open enrollment are discussed with students with disabilities prior to participating in programs?
3. Why do families participate in open enrollment programs?
4. Who is involved in decision-making relative to open enrollment?

5. To what extent do family members agree regarding decisions to participate in open enrollment?
6. To what extent does home school provide assistance to families participate in open enrollment?
7. What information is available and helpful to families who decide to transfer under open enrollment options?
8. To what extent are students with disabilities pressured to stay or recruited to leave under open enrollment programs?
9. Why do people decide not to participate?

Expectations

1. To what extent do behaviors change for students who participate in open enrollment programs?
2. To what extent are families of students active in school business prior to participating in open enrollment?
3. To what extent are families of students with disabilities active in school business after participating in open enrollment?

## Method

A survey of families participating in the Minnesota Open Enrollment Options Program was distributed by the Minnesota Department of Education to over 2,600 parents of open enrollment applicants. Issues and concerns of parents and other professionals related to public school choice were identified. Information related to decision-making and expectations was examined.

**Participants**

Seventy-five families with approved applications to change school districts participated in this research; each had checked an item on the survey indicating that the child in the program had a handicapping condition requiring an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Categorical classification information was not available for these students.

The child participating in the open enrollment program was the only one at home for about one third (35%) of the families. Very few participating families had 4 or more children living at home. Most (63%) of the participants were living in rural areas and the distribution was about evenly split between urban (17%) and suburban (20%) families. Ninety-six percent were white families with medium ($20-50,000) incomes. Most parents had educational experiences beyond high school. Additional demographic information on families participating in the research is presented in Table 1.

**Procedures**

Families using Open Enrollment Options were required to submit a standard, state-developed application form to the district of their choice on or before January 1 of the year in which they wished to enroll in a nonresident district. Residents of Duluth, Minneapolis, and St. Paul could apply to change districts at any time during the year. Approved applications were submitted to the state Department of Education and served as a database for subsequent research. The Minnesota Department of Education conducted a mail survey of participants in the Open

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics Of Families Responding

| Variable | Number of Respondents n | (%) |
|---|---|---|
| School Aged Children At Home | | |
| 1 | 26 | (35) |
| 2 | 23 | (31) |
| 3 | 19 | (25) |
| 4 | 5 | (7) |
| 5 | 1 | (1) |
| 6 | 1 | (1) |
| Relation To Children | | |
| Parent | 72 | (97) |
| Other Relative | 0 | (0) |
| Legal Guardian | 2 | (3) |
| Other | 0 | (0) |
| Home Living Area | | |
| Urban | 13 | (17) |
| Suburban | 15 | (20) |
| Rural | 47 | (63) |
| Ethnic Background | | |
| White | 72 | (96) |
| Black | 0 | (0) |
| Hispanic | 2 | (3) |
| Asian | 0 | (0) |
| American Indian | 1 | (1) |
| Other | 0 | (0) |
| Education | | |
| Father | | |
| Less than high school | 3 | (5) |
| High school | 26 | (41) |
| Some college | 21 | (33) |
| Four years of college | 6 | (9) |
| More than four years | 8 | (12) |

Table 1 (continued)

| Variable | Number of Respondents n | (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Education | | |
| Mother | | |
| Less than high school | 0 | (0) |
| High school | 21 | (29) |
| Some college | 36 | (50) |
| Four years of college | 3 | (4) |
| More than four years | 12 | (17) |
| Income | | |
| Below $10,000 | 2 | (3) |
| $10-20,000 | 10 | (15) |
| $20-30,000 | 16 | (25) |
| $30-40,000 | 16 | (25) |
| $40-50,000 | 13 | (20) |
| Over $50,000 | 8 | (12) |

Note. Number in parenthesis is percent of respondents answering original item. Not every respondent answered every item.

Enrollment Options Program to obtain preliminary information on the use and impact of choice.

**Instrument**

Four types of information were gathered in the pencil and paper survey used in this research. In addition to general demographic information about the respondents, the survey included items related to open enrollment information sources, family decision-making related to open enrollment, and the effects of exercising the open enrollment option on participating students. Most items required respondents to indicate opinions by checking options in multiple-choice options (e.g., From what sources did you obtain information...? Which of the following problems, if any, did you encounter...?). Several Likert-type items were included (e.g., What was the level of agreement between you and your child...?) and three open-ended items were included (e.g., What is ... program's greatest strength?).

## Results

Information sources for families participating in the Open Enrollment Options Program are listed in Table 2; percentages of participants indicating they used a source as well as percents indicating their "most valuable source" are provided. More than 20 percent of the families indicated that the media and school principals provided information about the program; principals were considered the "one most valuable source" of information by 25 percent of the respondents.

Table 2

Information Sources For Families Who Participate In Open Enrollment Options Program

| Source | Percent of Respondents (%) | (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Teacher | 17 | (4) |
| Counselor | 7 | (0) |
| Principal | 27 | (25) |
| Child | 12 | (1) |
| Family Member/Relative | 9 | (7) |
| Friend/Neighbor | 19 | (5) |
| Employer | 1 | (3) |
| Social Worker | 3 | (0) |
| Brochure/Flyer | 16 | (1) |
| Newsletter | 20 | (5) |
| Media | 40 | (15) |
| Hotline | 1 | (0) |
| Meeting | 5 | (5) |
| Social Service Agency | 4 | (0) |

Note. Number in parenthesis is percent who checked item as the "one most valuable source" of information. Respondents could choose more than one source.

Problems encountered by families of students with disabilities who participate in open enrollment are presented in Table 3. Most parents (73%) indicated that they did not experience any problems obtaining information. About one third reported that the home school was not helpful; very few indicated that the new school was not helpful.

Parents and guardians were reportedly first to have idea to participate in the Open Enrollment Options Program. Eighteen percent of the families reported that the participating child was first to have the idea; other sources are indicated in Table 4.

Topics discussed with students relative to participation in open enrollment are presented in Table 5. More than half the families reported discussing transportation, education at home and new schools, social life, and extracurricular experiences.

Reasons families of students with disabilities participate in open enrollment are presented in Table 6. More that half the parents (51%) indicated that they thought the services would be better as a result of a school transfer; twenty-four percent listed this as their "most important" reason. The new school's academic reputation and climate for learning were also among the reasons supplied by many parents for electing to change schools or districts under the Open Enrollment Program. Graduation requirements, location relative to work, opportunities for parent participation, and encouragement to stay in school were among the reasons selected by less parents.

Table 3

Problems Encountered By Families Who Participate In Open Enrollment Options Program

| Problems | Number of Respondents n | (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Not Any | 53 | (73) |
| Took Long Time | 4 | (6) |
| Difficult To Understand | 1 | (1) |
| Inadequate/Inaccurate | 3 | (4) |
| Process Complicated | 2 | (3) |
| Home School Not Helpful | 22 | (30) |
| New School Not Helpful | 1 | (1) |

Note. Number in parenthesis reflects percentage of families (n=73) answering each item. Respondents could indicate more than one problem.

Table 4

Who First Had Idea To Participate In Open Enrollment Options Program

| Source | Number of Respondents n | (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Mother/Father/Guardian(s) | 48 | (76) |
| Child/Children | 11 | (18) |
| School Principal(s) | 1 | (2) |
| Teacher(s) | 0 | (0) |
| School Counselor(s) | 2 | (3) |
| Friend(s) | 1 | (2) |
| Other Family Members | 0 | (0) |
| Other | 0 | (0) |

Note. Number in parenthesis reflects percentage of families (n=63) answering each item.

Table 5

Topics Discussed With Students Relative To Participation In Open Enrollment Options Program

| Source | Number of Respondents n | (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Transportation | 44 | (60) |
| Education At Home School | 38 | (51) |
| Education At New School | 49 | (66) |
| Social Life | 49 | (66) |
| Extracurricular Activities | 40 | (54) |
| Other | 13 | (18) |
| None, Child Too Young | 8 | (11) |

Note. Number in parenthesis reflects percentage of families (n=74) answering each item.

Table 6

Reasons Families Participate In Open Enrollment Options Program

| Reasons | Number of Respondents (%) | (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Location Of New School | | |
| Closer To Home | 21 | (11) |
| Closer To Work | 16 | (4) |
| Friends Attend New School | 25 | (1) |
| Services Are Better | 51 | (24) |
| Strong Academic Reputation | 40 | (4) |
| More Course Variety | 29 | (7) |
| Extended Day Programs | 3 | (0) |
| More Parent Participation | 17 | (0) |
| Fewer Graduation Requirements | 1 | (0) |
| Better Athletics/Extracurricular | 24 | (1) |
| Previous School Board | 29 | (4) |
| New School Offers Fresh Start | 37 | (1) |
| New School Encouraging Staying | 17 | (1) |
| Positive Climate For Learning | 48 | (8) |
| Other | 27 | (5) |

Note. Number in parenthesis is percent of respondents who checked item as "most important" reason. Respondents could choose more than one reason.

People reportedly involved in decisions to apply for school transfers are presented in Table 7. Parents and children were involved in most cases and school officials and teachers were included to a lesser extent.

The level of agreement between parents and children regarding applications to change schools was relatively high; two-thirds of the respondents indicated that all family members agreed that a change of schools would be best. Conflicting levels of agreement were reported by less than a third of the families (see Table 8).

Ratings of helpfulness of the home school/district are presented in Table 9. In making a decision to transfer, most families (65%) reported not seeking guidance from the district or former school. When they did seek assistance, most reported the school or district was not very helpful.

Kinds of information used in making decisions to transfer are presented in Table 10. Most families (64%) reported school visits as being available and helpful in making a decision about participation in the Open Enrollment Program. Opportunities to talk with teachers and school profiles/brochures were also checked by at least 25 percent of the respondents.

Most families did not believe that anyone at the home school was pressuring them to stay or the new school was pressuring them to leave. Those families reporting pressure believed it was in regard to a decision to stay more than one related to changing to a new school.

Table 7

Who Was Involved In Decision To Transfer

| Decision-Maker | Number of Respondents n | (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Mother/Father/Guardian(s) | 64 | (85) |
| Child/Children | 46 | (61) |
| School Principal(s) | 23 | (31) |
| Teacher(s) | 12 | (16) |
| School Counselor(s) | 8 | (11) |
| Friend(s) | 10 | (13) |
| Other Family Members | 13 | (17) |
| Other | 9 | (12) |

Note. Number in parenthesis reflects percentage of respondents (n=75) answering each item.

Table 8

Level Of Agreement With Regard To Decision To Transfer

| Variable | Number of Respondents n | (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Parents Decided/Child Too Young | 9 | (13) |
| All Agreed | 46 | (67) |
| Parents Decided/Child Neutral | 6 | (9) |
| Parents Decided/Child Against | 3 | (4) |
| Parents Neutral/Child Wanted | 5 | (7) |
| Parents Against/Child Wanted | 0 | (0) |
| No Answer | 6 | |

Note. Number of respondents answering each item varied; number in parenthesis reflects relative percentage.

Table 9

Comparison Of Helpfulness Of Home School

| Helpfulness | Number of Respondents n | (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Did Not Seek Guidance | 48 | (65) |
| Very Helpful | 8 | (11) |
| Somewhat Helpful | 2 | (3) |
| Not Very Helpful | 16 | (21) |

Note. Number of respondents answering each item varied; number in parenthesis reflects relative percentage.

Table 10

Kinds Of Information Used In Making Decision To Transfer

| Information Source | Number of Respondents n | (%) |
|---|---|---|
| School Profiles/Brochures | 18 | (27) |
| Parent Meetings | 10 | (15) |
| Family/School Conferences | 10 | (15) |
| School Visits | 42 | (64) |
| Talk To Teachers | 26 | (39) |
| Multilingual Services | 0 | (0) |
| Other | 17 | (26) |

Note. Number of respondents answering each item varied; number in parenthesis reflects relative percentage.

Table 11

Comparison Of Pressures Involved In Decision To Transfer

| Pressures Involved in Decision | Number of Respondents n | (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Pressured To Stay At Former School | | |
| YES | 27 | (38) |
| NO | 45 | (62) |
| Pressured To Change To New School | | |
| YES | 1 | (1) |
| NO | 73 | (99) |

Note. Number of respondents answering each item varied; number in parenthesis reflects relative percentage.

Ratings of numbers of families indicating that student's behaviors and attitudes had improved as result of participation in the Open Enrollment Program are presented in Table 12. Confidence in abilities, motivation to learn, academic performance, satisfaction with teachers and learning, and relations with friends were among the items checked by the most people.

A comparison of family involvement in the schools before and after participation in the Open Enrollment Program is presented in Table 13. Involvement remained relatively constant after participating in the Open Enrollment Program. Attendance at school events and frequent teacher contacts were among the items checked by most families before and after exercising open enrollment options.

## Discussion

Information about the use of school choice by students with disabilities is important to examine as enrollment options are being implemented in various states around the country. However, little is known about the participation of students with disabilities and the issues that surround their decision to transfer as they access school choice. The findings from this study can contribute to a broader understanding of one type of enrollment option, open enrollment, and the participation of students with disabilities.

Some argue that this reform will result in a segregation of schools according to socioeconomic factors (Baldwin, 1990). In his critique of school choice reform, Heckman (1990) states that

Table 12

Kinds Of Positive Behavior Change Associated With Making Decision To Transfer

| Behavior/Attitude | Number of Respondents n | (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Confidence In Abilities | 50 | (75) |
| Motivation To Learn | 48 | (73) |
| Academic Performance | 45 | (67) |
| Satisfaction With Learning | 45 | (67) |
| Satisfaction With Teachers | 43 | (63) |
| Relations With Friends | 43 | (63) |
| Sense Of Responsibility | 38 | (56) |
| Higher Education Aspirations | 34 | (52) |
| Higher Career Aspirations | 27 | (44) |
| Study Time | 27 | (42) |
| Athletics Participation | 26 | (41) |
| Extracurricular Participation | 26 | (41) |
| School Attendance | 17 | (26) |
| Time Spent With Family | 12 | (19) |
| Other | 13 | (93) |

Note. Number of respondents answering each item varied; number in parenthesis reflects relative percentage.

Table 13

Comparison Of Family Involvement In Schools

| Variable | Number of Respondents n | (%) |
|---|---|---|
| **Before Transfer** | | |
| Participated In PTA | 16 | (22) |
| Volunteered Regularly | 18 | (25) |
| Attended School Events | 52 | (72) |
| Contacted Teachers Frequently | 59 | (82) |
| Committee Participation (District) | 9 | (13) |
| Committee Participation (School) | 15 | (21) |
| Occasional Involvement | 25 | (35) |
| Not Involved | 12 | (17) |
| **After Transfer** | | |
| Participated In PTA | 10 | (15) |
| Volunteered Regularly | 11 | (16) |
| Attended School Events | 56 | (81) |
| Contacted Teachers Frequently | 61 | (88) |
| Committee Participation (District) | 2 | (3) |
| Committee Participation (School) | 12 | (17) |
| Occasional Involvement | 34 | (49) |
| Not Involved | 3 | (4) |
| Transportation Limits Involvement | 14 | (20) |

Note. Number in parenthesis reflects percentage of respondents answering each item. Not all respondents answered this item.

"schools of choice have great potential for further stratifying children in and among school(s), resulting in negative consequences for them and for society."

A close look at the 1990 census data and the information provided by the respondents in this study reveal that for those families with middle incomes the participation nearly mirrors that of the Minnesota's general population (1990 Census of Population and Housing). However, there are proportionately fewer participants with disabilities accessing open enrollment in the higher income levels (over $50,000) and the lowest income levels (less than $10,000). The level of educational attainment varies for the mothers and fathers of the participants. The father's level of education is similar to the state's general population of those over age 25. However, the mother's level of education is higher than the general population with the majority of mothers of open enrollment participants with disabilities having at least some college (50% vs. 28%). The locales of the respondents closely resembles the pattern of the general population with half living in a metropolitan area and half residing in the rural areas.

The demographics described in this study do not totally refute the arguments of participation being dependent upon income and educational level; but, they also do not indicate a strong argument for segregation according to these characteristics. There is participation within various income levels and depending upon which parent's educational level is used there is participation by parents with differing educational levels. The

locale does not seem to be a factor in participation. These data do not suggest that participation in open enrollment is only for the well-to-do and well educated. However, it should be noted that though income levels vary, the education level of mothers of participants is rather high. In addition, the parents' level of interest and knowledge of the schools may be enhanced due to their being involved in special education and the requirements P.L. 94-142 places on parents.

The findings from this study provide a more in-depth look at the parents and how they access choice. They receive the information about choice from a variety of sources with many seeking additional information. They are usually the initiators of the transfer and they discuss the issues surrounding choice with their child. The reasons they indicate for participation in choice involve a search for better services and a positive climate for learning. These findings suggest that parents of students with disabilities are approaching the transfer of their children in a thoughtful, informed manner.

There are concerns that the process surrounding a school choice option, such as open enrollment, may be made more difficult for parents of students with disabilities. Our findings give some reason for concern. Only one parent indicated they were pressured to change schools; yet, 38% indicated they were pressured to stay in their home school. For those parents who did seek guidance from their home school a majority indicated that the staff from the home school was not very helpful. Is coercion being applied to parents of students with disabilities to stay in the home

district? An investigation of the reasons for the schools applying pressure would be helpful in the determination of the source of the problem. Do the districts fear a negative change in their programming if a transfer occurred? Is the loss of funding that would result from the transfer a concern?

There is discussion surrounding the role parents play when their children transfer school through school choice. Parent involvement is often seen as a key element of school choice. (ASCD, 1990). The parents of students with disabilities report an increase in their contact with teachers, attendance at school events and occasional involvement at the schools after the transfer. The percentage of parents not involved in some school activity dropped. However, there is also some evidence of a change in the other direction. After the transfer, more parents reported less participation in PTA, volunteering, and in school and district committee participation. Twenty percent found that transportation limited their involvement at the new school. This suggests a "mixed bag" when looking at parental involvement. The activities that most directly affected their child such as teacher contact and attendance at their child's school events increased; but, activities that may indicate a broader commitment to the school community such as committee participation and PTA attendance decreased. Distance to the new school may prohibit greater involvement. However, the change in the level of involvement may also be associated with attending school outside of the community in which there is already an investment; thus dividing their loyalties. The disability of the child may also be

a consideration. Parents may be restricted in their ability to attend functions farther from home due to the availability of difficult-to-attain childcare for their child with a disability. More detailed interviews with parents to clarify the reasons for their level of school involvement are necessary to understand the differences in participation.

The parents judged many of their children's behaviors to be positively changed after the open enrollment transfer. This was particularly true for behaviors associated with learning; such as "confidence in abilities", "motivation to learn", "academic performance", and "satisfaction with learning". Whether the behavior actually changed or not requires additional investigations, but what can be noted is that parents perceive the transfer as resulting in positive behavior changes in areas that are directly related to academic achievement.

As policymakers examine the choice programs being implemented around the country and make further decisions about the role school choice will play in the reforms of the 1990's, students with disabilities and their decisions concerning school choice must be monitored to have a better understanding of how this reform will affect all students. This study provides much needed data to begin the process of an examination of school choice.

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# PUBLICATIONS

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Monograph 1 — Open Enrollment and Students With Disabilities: Issues, Concerns, Fears, and Anticipated Benefits by J. E. Ysseldyke, M. L. Thurlow, B. Algozzine, & J. Nathan (October, 1991).

This paper presents a description of the implications of open enrollment for students with disabilities and for districts that gain or lose students with disabilities through transfer. The description is based on a review of the professional literature and on the results of an issues clarification working session attended by professionals, legislators, parents, and students. Three kinds of issues for districts and students have been identified: outcomes issues, implementation issues, and demographic issues. These are described in detail. Five major kinds of concerns reflected in debates about choice are also discussed: concern about pupil benefit, parent involvement (and convenience), teacher/administrator job protection, change, and teacher workload.

Research Report 1 — Participation of Students with Disabilities and Special Needs in Postsecondary Enrollment Options by C. M. Lange, & J. E. Ysseldyke (November, 1991).

This report documents the participation of students with disabilities or special needs in Minnesota's Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO). PSEO allows students in 11th and 12th grade to take college and technical school courses for credit. The 77 participation postsecondary institutions were surveyed. Eight percent of the reported participants were students with disabilities or special needs with the majority being students with learning disabilities. However, all disability and special needs groups were represented. The majority of students with disabilities attended technical colleges. Implications for students with disabilities and their programs are discussed.

Research Report 2 — Public School Choice: What About Students With Disabilities? by J. E. Ysseldyke, C. M. Lange, & B. Algozzine (November, 1991).

This report presents the results of a survey sent to Minnesota's Directors of Special Education asking them to identify the important issues and concerns relating to school choice options and special education. Excess program costs, the effects of enrollment options on the planning process (enrollment projections, staffing, variety of programs, etc.) and the billing of resident districts for special education services were found to be the most important issues. The Directors' concerns about the logistical problems with enrollment options and special education are discussed.

Research Report 3 — Students with Disabilities Use of Various Options to Access Alternative Schools and Area Learning Centers by D. J. Gorney, & J. E. Ysseldyke (January, 1992).

This report describes the participation of students with disabilities and special needs in two of Minnesota's enrollment options for at-risk students, Alternative Schools and Area Learning Centers (ALC). Results indicate that students with disabilities are accessing Alternative School/ALC programs in ways similar to non-disabled students. Students with emotional/behavioral disorders are heavily represented in these schools. It was also discovered that when students enter these programs, special education labels are often dropped and services discontinued. Implications for special education are discussed.

Research Report 4 — Participation of Different Categories of Students with Special Needs in Enrollment Options by J. E. Ysseldyke & C. M. Lange (January, 1992).

This report presents the results of a survey sent to a random sample of Minnesota's Directors of Special Education documenting the participation rates of students with disabilities in several of Minnesota enrollment option programs. A large majority of students with disabilities were found to be transferring school districts using tuition agreements. Students demonstrating emotional/behavioral disorders were found to be the largest disability group transferring schools. And, significant differences were found in participation rates between districts of differing enrollments.

Research Report 5

Parents of Students with Disabilities and Open Enrollment: Characteristics and Reasons for Transfer by J. E. Ysseldyke, C. M. Lange, D. J. Gorney, & Y. Lau (April, 1992).

This report documents the characteristics of students with disabilities and special needs who participate in one of Minnesota's seven school choice options, open enrollment. Surveys were sent to the parents of all 1990-1991 open enrollment applicants who had indicated their child had a disability or special educational need. The reasons for participation, the sources of information, and the decision-making process involved with choosing another school are presented. How the reasons differ as a function of disability category, location, grade level, and parents' income level or education level are examined. Implications for policymakers, administrators, and teachers are discussed.

Research Report 6

Looking at School Choice: Parents' Comments on Open Enrollment and Their Children with Disabilities by J. E. Ysseldyke, C. M. Lange, Y. Lau, & T. J. Delaney (May, 1992).

This report examines the qualitative comments shared by parents of students with disabilities and students served in gifted programs about one of Minnesota's seven school choice options, open enrollment. Surveys were sent to parents of 1990-1991 open enrollment applicants who had indicated their child had a disability or special educational need. The survey included a section for comments. Many parents included comments and these are analyzed in this report. The majority of the respondents reported satisfaction with the open enrollment program. Responses of students with disabilities and those served in gifted programs are compared as are those from rural and metropolitan areas.

Research Report 7

School Choice Programs in the Fifty States by J. E. Ysseldyke, C. M. Lange, and T. J. Delaney (August, 1992).

This report documents the school choice programs available in each of the fifty states. These programs are generally of eight types: magnet schools, postsecondary enrollment programs, drop-out prevention programs, intradistrict open enrollment, interdistrict open enrollment, voucher programs, tuition agreement programs, and charter schools. A brief description of the school choice programs in each state is provided.

Research Report 8

A Comparison of Families of Students With and Without Disabilities Who Use Open Enrollment Options to Transfer Schools by J. E. Ysseldyke, C. M. Lange, and B. Algozzine (August, 1992).

A cross-sectional survey was conducted to identify facts and opinions about selected aspects of contemporary practices related to the school choice option, open enrollment. Responses from families of students with disabilities were compared to responses of a similar group of families of students without disabilities who had transferred schools through the interdistrict transfer option in Minnesota called open enrollment. Information about the demographics, reasons for transfer, decision-making, source of information, and satisfaction of the respondents is presented. The differences between these two groups are examined and discussed.

Research Report 9

Open Enrollment and Students With Disabilities: Where Are We and Where Are We Going? by J. E. Ysseldyke, C. M. Lange, and B. Algozzine (August, 1992).

This report examines the opinions of families of students with disabilities participating in one of Minnesota's school choice options, open enrollment. Results of a survey that included general demographic information, information sources, family decision-making related to open enrollment, and the effects of exercising the option on participating students are included. Results of this research suggest generally favorable responses for families of students with disabilities participating in this school choice program.